

## CHAPTER 24

### *Al-Nûr: The Light*

(REVEALED AT MADÎNAH: 9 sections; 64 verses)

The title of this chapter, *The Light*, is taken from the statement made in sec. 5, where Islâm is shown to be the most perfect manifestation of Divine light, which will illumine the East as well as the West. As already pointed out in the last introductory note, the group of the Makkan chapters beginning with the 17th and ending with the 23rd chapter deals with the great and triumphant future of Islâm, and hence it is fittingly followed by a Madînah chapter which promises in the clearest words the establishment of the kingdom of Islâm (verse 55).

While showing Islâm to be a perfect manifestation of Divine Light, it is added that this light will first illumine the houses in which the Muslims live (verse 36). The home being thus the unit for spreading light throughout the world, this chapter deals specially with the purity of home life and therefore opens with a condemnation of adultery, the canker of the purity of home life. There is another reason, too. This chapter promises the establishment of a Muslim kingdom, and kingdom brings ease and luxury in its train, leading to such social evils as adultery and slander. While the first section deals with adultery in general, the second speaks of a particular case of slander, the slander made against ‘Ā’ishah, the Prophet’s wife. The third section of the chapter, while it reveals pardoning ‘Ā’ishah’s slanderers deal with the slanderers of women in general. The fourth section deals with the preventive measures which serve as a check upon adulterous intercourse. Then follow three sections dealing with the kindling of Divine light in Muslim hearts and the manifestation of Divine power in establishing the kingdom of Islâm. The eighth section again refers to the subject matter of the opening sections by enjoining respect for each other’s privacy, which is calculated to put restraint upon the tongue of slander, and the last section teaches respect for the Prophet’s orders, because his orders related to the welfare of the community.

The whole of this chapter is universally held to be a Madînah revelation, and it is almost certain that the major portion was revealed about the fifth year of the Hijrah.

## SECTION 1: Law relating to Adultery

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

**1** (This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory and wherein We have revealed clear messages that you may be mindful.

**2** The adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them (with) a hundred stripes,<sup>a</sup> and let not pity for them detain you from obedience to Allâh, if you believe in Allâh and the Last Day, and let a party of believers witness their chastisement.

**3** The adulterer cannot have sexual relations with any but an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress none can have sexual relations with her but an adulterer or an idolater; and it is forbidden to believers.<sup>a</sup>

**2a.** Chastity, as a virtue, is not given the first place in modern civilized society, and hence adultery is not considered a sufficiently serious offence to subject the guilty party to any punishment except the payment of damages to the injured husband. The breach of the greatest trust which can be imposed in a man or a woman, the breach which ruins families, destroys household peace, and deprives innocent children of their loving mothers, is not looked upon even as seriously as the breach of trust of a few pounds. Hence the Islâmic law seems to be too severe to a Westerner.

The punishment for adultery is here stated to be flogging, *not stoning to death*, which was really prescribed by the Jewish law. The cases of *stoning to death* for adultery by the Prophet's orders relate actually to a Jew and a Jewess in one case (B. 23:61), and others apparently occurred before the revelation of this chapter. That stoning to death was never contemplated by Islâm as a punishment for adultery is made clear by 4:25, where it is stated expressly that the punishment for adultery in the case of slave-girls, when they are married, is *half the punishment which is inflicted on free married women*, and stoning to death could not be halved. Besides, the Qur'ân nowhere speaks of stoning as a punishment for adultery, and the report of what 'Umar said is self-contradictory. For a full discussion, see *The Religion of Islâm*, chapter Penal Laws of Islâm. A few words may be added as to the method of flogging. It aimed more at disgracing the culprit than at torturing him. In the time of the Prophet, and even for some time after him, there was no whip, and flogging was carried out by beating with a stick or with the hand or with shoes. The culprit was not stripped naked, but he was required to take off thick clothes.

**3a.** The word *nakaha* signifies sometimes *coitus* or *coitus without marriage*, as also *marriage without coitus* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). I adopt the first significance here and the meaning in this case is clear, the idolater or the idolatress being mentioned along with the adulterer or the adulteress, on account of the low standard of morality among the idolaters. Taking the second significance, the verse places one guilty of adultery under a kind of interdict in Muslim society.

**4** And those who accuse free women and bring not four witnesses, flog them (with) eighty stripes and never accept their evidence, and these are the transgressors <sup>a</sup>—

**5** Except those who afterwards repent and act aright; surely Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.

**6** And those who accuse their wives and have no witnesses except themselves,<sup>a</sup> let one of them testify four times, bearing Allâh to witness, that he is of those who speak the truth.

**7** And the fifth (time) that the curse of Allâh be on him, if he is of those who lie.

**8** And it shall avert the chastisement from her, if she testifies four times, bearing Allâh to witness, that he is of those who lie.

**9** And the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allâh be on her, if he is of those who speak the truth.

**10** And were it not for Allâh's grace upon you and His mercy — and that Allâh is Oft-returning (to mercy) Wise!

**4a.** This is an effectual restraint against slander and gossip, which so often bring disaster upon the heads of innocent women. Unless there is the clearest evidence of adultery against a woman, the slanderer is himself to be punished.

**6a.** The ordinance relates to the case of husbands who accuse their wives of adultery and have no evidence; see a case reported in Bukhârî 68:30. In such a case divorce is effected, the husband not being punishable for the accusation, though he cannot produce witnesses, and the wife not being punishable for adultery, if she denies the charge in the manner stated. Compare Numbers 5:11–31. The same procedure would be adopted in a reverse case.

## SECTION 2: 'Â'ishah's Slanderers

**11** Surely they who concocted the lie are a party from among you.<sup>a</sup> Deem it not an evil to you. Nay, it is good for you. For every man of them is what he has earned of sin; and as for him among them who took upon himself the main part thereof, he shall have a grievous punishment.<sup>b</sup>

**12** Why did not the believing men and the believing women, when you heard it, think well of their own people, and say: This is an evident falsehood?

*a*

**13** Why did they not bring four witnesses of it? So, as they have not brought witnesses, they are liars in the sight of Allâh.<sup>a</sup>

**11a.** The incident referred to in this section took place when the Prophet, accompanied by his wife ‘A’ishah, was returning from the expedition against the Bans Mustaliq in the fifth year of the Hijrah. ‘Ā’ishah had gone out on a private occasion, but, when she returned, she perceived that she had lost her necklace, and went back to search for it.

In her absence the attendants, supposing her to be in her *howdah*, started while it was yet dark. When she returned, finding the camel and the men gone, she sat down there and was brought to Madînah by Safwân, who was coming in the rear. Some mischievous persons from among the hypocrites spread false reports, slandering her, and some of the Muslims also associated themselves with the slander. ‘Ā’ishah’s innocence was at length established by this revelation (Bukhârî 52:15). Those who had taken part in the accusation were punished, according to one *hadîth* (*Sunan* (Hadîth), by Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muḥammad ibn Yazîd *ibn Mâjah* al-Qazwînî 20:13). This is the grievous punishment referred to in the concluding words of the verse.

It may be added here that the tongue of gossip has never spared even the most virtuous women. Another case of a virtuous woman being thus defamed is that of Maryam, the mother of ‘Îsâ, about whom the Jews talked similar slander. The addition of the words — *deem it not an evil to you: nay, it is good for you* — aims at bringing solace to such aggrieved people, seeing that even the most virtuous of women could not escape the tongue of slander.

**11b.** He who took the main part thereof upon himself is said to be ‘Abd Allâh ibn Ubayy, the chief of the hypocrites (Bukhârî 64:36), because he concocted the lie and circulated the false report.

**12a.** There was not a *single witness*, nor any circumstance that could lend colour to the false story.

**13a.** Severe as the punishment for adultery is in Islam, the evidence of four witnesses is required to establish the guilt; see verse 4. The allegation of a Christian annotator that this requirement of the law was simply to shield ‘Ā’ishah is a baseless conjecture in view of the fact that in her case there was not a single witness. Why should the Prophet then have required four witnesses? The fact is that while the Qur’ân takes a very serious view of the crimes against chastity, it also makes criminal the circulation of false reports affecting a woman’s chastity. Thus even a lighter accusation in connection with the misconduct of women required the evidence of four witnesses; see 4:15, which was admittedly revealed earlier.

**14** And were it not for Allâh’s grace upon you and His mercy in this world and the Hereafter, a grievous chastisement would certainly have touched you on account of the talk you indulged in.

**15** When you received it on your tongues and spoke with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge, and you deemed it a trifle, while with Allâh it was serious.

**16** And why did you not, when you heard it, say: It beseems us not to talk of it. Glory be to You! This is a great calumny.

**17** Allâh admonishes you that you return not to the like of it ever again, if you are believers.

**18** And Allâh makes clear to you the messages; and Allâh is Knowing, Wise.

**19** Those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, for them is a grievous chastisement in this world and the Hereafter. And Allâh knows, while you know not.

**20** And were it not for Allâh’s grace on you and His mercy<sup>a</sup>— and that Allâh is Compassionate, Merciful.

**20a.** The same words in the next verse are followed by the statement, *not one of you would ever have been pure*.

### SECTION 3: Slanderers of Women

**21** O you who believe, follow not the footsteps of the *shaitân*. And whoever follows the footsteps of the *shaitân*, surely he commands indecency and evil. And were it not

for Allâh's grace on you and His mercy, not one of you would ever have been pure, but Allâh purifies whom He pleases. And Allâh is Hearing, Knowing.<sup>a</sup>

**22** And let not possessors of grace and abundance among you swear against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allâh's way; and pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allâh should forgive you? And Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.<sup>a</sup>

**23** Surely those who accuse chaste believing women, unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and for them is a grievous chastisement,<sup>a</sup>

**24** On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet bear witness against them as to what they did,<sup>a</sup>

**21a.** This passage shows that the companions of the Holy Prophet were purified from sins by Allâh's grace.

**22a.** It is agreed on the basis of most trustworthy reports that this verse was revealed in connection with the action of Abû Bakr, who had sworn not to allow maintenance to one of his relatives named Mistah, who had taken part in spreading the false reports against 'Â'ishah. After inflicting the legal punishment on the culprits the Prophet was required to bear them no ill-will, and to hide no rancour in his breast even towards the slanderers of his wife. Revelation even required his companions to be kind and forgiving to them. Abû Bakr is spoken of here as *one possessing grace and abundance* (Bukhârî 65: xxiv, 13), the former of these words referring to his moral and religious superiority and the latter to abundance in wealth.

**23a.** This refers to those who continue to spread evil reports concerning chaste women, the gossip-mongers in every society.

**24a.** The evidence of the members of the body is sometimes witnessed in this very life against the doers of evil, in the consequences of the evil done. On the day of Resurrection the consequences of the evil deeds will assume a palpable form, as is also indicated in the paying back in full of the just rewards in the next verse, and thus bear witness to the evil done. This highly developed idea of the Resurrection did not exist before the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân.

**25** On that day Allâh will pay back to them in full their just reward, and they will know that Allâh, He is the Evident Truth.

**26** Unclean things are for unclean ones and unclean ones are for unclean things, and good things are for good ones and good ones are for good things; these are free from what they say. For them is forgiveness and an honourable sustenance.<sup>a</sup>

#### SECTION 4: Preventive Measures

**27** O you who believe, enter not houses other than your own houses, until you have asked permission and saluted their inmates. This is better for you that you may be mindful.<sup>a</sup>

**28** But if you find no one therein, enter them not, until permission is given to you; and if it is said to you, Go back, then go back; this is purer for you. And Allâh is Knower of what you do.

**29** It is no sin for you to enter uninhabited houses wherein you have your necessities. And Allâh knows what you do openly and what you hide.

**26a.** The meaning of this whole passage is made clear by the concluding words, i.e., nothing impure can be attributed to the pure ones, and they are free from what the impure ones say.

**27a.** The Arabs entered houses without permission. The law revealed in this verse lays down the basis of domestic peace and security needed for an advanced society. The law is a clear testimony of the great trust which Muslims have in their womenfolk. It is also a preventive measure against slander.

**30** Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allâh is Aware of what they do.<sup>a</sup>

**31** And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof.<sup>a</sup> And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms.<sup>b</sup> And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or guileless male servants,<sup>c</sup> or the children who know not women's nakedness. And let

them not strike their feet so that the adornment that they hide may be known. And turn to Allâh all, O believers, so that you may be successful.

**30a.** Men are enjoined to lower their gaze, just as women are enjoined to do in the next verse. This injunction is given as a preventive against an evil which deals a deathblow to all pure social relations, viz., the evil of fornication. The Qur'ân does not only forbid an evil, but also points out the way, by walking in which man may be able to eschew it. Both men and women are required to keep their eyes cast down; so that when they meet each other, neither should men stare at women nor women at men. In a society in which women never appeared in public, the injunction to men to lower their gaze would be meaningless; and the similar injunction to women given in the next verse, if they never left the compounds of their houses, would be absurd.

**31a.** To guard the relations between males and females and to check a too free intermingling of men and women, the Qur'ân now lays down another injunction in addition to that which requires both sexes to lower their gaze when they meet each other. It requires women in particular not to display their adornment. There is a difference of opinion as to what *zînat* means. According to some it includes the beauty of the body, while according to others it is exclusively applied to external adornments. The use of the same word in the concluding portion of the verse, *let them not strike their feet so that the zînat that they hide may be known*, clearly supports the latter view, as the only adornment that can be known by the striking of the feet consists of external ornaments. But even taking the first view, there is a clear exception here, *illâ mâ zahara min-hâ* — *except what appears thereof* or *except that which it is customary and natural to uncover*. Now in the first place it must be remembered that what is prohibited is the *display* of beauty, as elsewhere expressly indicated by the word *taburruj*: “And display not (your beauty) like the displaying of the ignorance of yore” (33:33). As to what parts of the body the woman is required to cover and what she may uncover the following summary of the earlier views relating to this exception given by *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Imâm Abû Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî should suffice: (1) it means the adornment of dress or the clothes that a woman wears; in other words, she is not required to cover the clothes she wears; (2) it means the adornment which the woman is not required to cover, such as collyrium, rings, bracelets and her face; (3) the exception relates to a woman’s clothing and her face. After relating these opinions, IJ adds: *The most*



*correct opinion is that the exception relates to the face and hands.* As an argument corroborating this opinion he says that, when praying, the woman is not required to keep her face and hands covered — hands up to the elbow — while she is required to cover the rest of the body. According to Hâdîth, the Prophet himself is reported to have told Asmâ', his wife 'Â'ishah's sister, when she appeared before him in thin clothes, through which parts of her body could be seen: "O Asmâ', when woman attains her puberty it is not proper that any part of her body should be seen except this, and he pointed to his face and hands" (*Kitâb al-Sunan (Hâdîth)*, by Abû Dâwûd Sulaimân 31:30). This settles conclusively that Islâm never enjoined the veil or covering of the face.

**32** And marry those among you who are single, and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves. If they are needy, Allâh will make them free from want out of His grace. And Allâh is Ample-giving, Knowing.<sup>a</sup>

**31b.** Before Islâm women used to appear in public with their breasts partly uncovered. The *khimar* (plural *khumr*) means a *head-covering*, and women were thus required to cover their breasts with a part of their head-covering. The head-covering as worn in the East conceals the arms, the neck and the bosom, as also the ornaments worn in the ears or on the neck or over the bosom, and the covering over of these parts is what is required here by the addition of the words *over their bosoms*.

**31c.** By *their women*, some commentators understand *Muslim women*, but it is a fact that women of other faiths mingled with believing women in the time of the Prophet, and therefore *all women* are meant. I think the word *their* has been added only to indicate all such women who come in contact with them, or women who are on the same social level with them. *Those whom their right hands possess* include male and female slaves. Next to slaves are mentioned *tâbi'în*, or *those who follow*, from *tabi'a*, *he followed*. Servants are here called followers because they follow the master. To this is added the qualifying phrase *ghairi uli-l-irbati*, which is ordinarily translated as meaning *not having need (of women)*. But *irb* really means *cunning* or *guile* or *deceit* or *wickedness* or *mischievousness* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), *need* being only its secondary significance when the *need* leads to *cunning*, the proper word for *need* being *arab*. Therefore some take these words as meaning *idiots* or persons deficient in intellect (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). But

while an idiot is not necessarily free from sexual impulse, he is certainly unfit for service. According to Mujâhid these words mean *people for whom their belly is their sole concern and about whom it is not feared that they will mislead women* — *la yuhimmu-hû illâ batnu-hû wa la yukshafu 'ala-l-nisâ'i* (Bukhârî 65:24). This is really what is meant. In these words, *ghari uli-l-irbati*, are spoken of male servants, who take up service only as a means of living and not with the mischievous intention of getting intimacy in the house. It should be noted that women are nowhere forbidden to employ male servants or to appear before them. What this verse prevents is only display of female beauty except to those most nearly related to women, and this is a preventive measure against the spread of loose ideas of morality, and a step to help restraint of sexual passions, which is all that the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân aims at.

**33** And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste, until Allâh makes them free from want out of His grace.<sup>a</sup> And those of your slaves who ask for a writing (of freedom), give them the writing, if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of Allâh which He has given you.<sup>b</sup> And compel not your slave-girls to prostitution when they desire to keep chaste, in order to seek the frail goods of this world's life. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.<sup>c</sup>

**32a.** The Arabic Glorious Qur'ân looks upon the married state as the normal state, and hence it enjoins that, so far as is possible, those who are single should be married. It also requires both male and female slaves to be kept in a state of marriage. The keeping of concubines or unmarried slave-girls is clearly inconsistent with this. As a religion Islâm is against celibacy, and considers parenthood to be the duty of every human being. In the civilized society of today most persons refuse to accept the responsibilities of parenthood, offering as an excuse the insufficiency of means to support a family. The Qur'ân disposes of this false excuse in the simple words, *if they are needy, Allâh will make them free from want out of His grace.*

The Holy Prophet, too, laid stress on Muslim men and women living in a married state. Thus he is reported to have said: "He who is able to marry should marry. For it keeps the gaze low and guards chastity; and he who cannot should take to fasting (occasionally), for it will have a castrating effect on him" (Bukhârî 30:10). On another occasion he said, addressing some young men who talked of fasting in the

day-time and keeping awake during the night, and keeping away from marriage: “I keep fast and I break it, and I pray and I sleep, and I am married, so whoever inclines to any other way than my sunnah, he is not of me” (Bukhârî 67:1). According to one hadîth, the man who marries perfects half his religion (*Mishkât al-Masâbîh* (Hadîth), by Shaikh Walî al-Dîn Muḥammad ‘Abd Allâh 13:1, iii). Celibacy is expressly forbidden (Bukhârî 67:8).

**33a.** The words translated as *those who cannot find a match* may also mean *those who cannot find the means to marry*. Marriage thus becomes an obligatory institution in Islâm, only those being excused who cannot find a match or who lack the means to marry. Marriage, in fact, affords the surest guarantee for the betterment of the moral tone of society.

**33b.** The word *kitâb*, translated *writing*, as used here, stands for *mukâtabah*, which is an infinitive noun of *kâtaba*, signifying *he (a slave) made a written (or other) contract with him (his master), that he (the former) should pay a certain sum as the price of himself, and on the payment thereof be free* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane); also *he (a master) made such a contract with him (his slave)*. It was called a *kitâb* (or writing) because of the obligation which the master imposed on himself. The money was paid in two or more instalments. Thus every possible facility was afforded to the slave to earn his freedom. Though the practice of the master making such a contract with the slave prevailed before the advent of Islâm, the important reform introduced by Islam was that, when a slave desired such a contract to be made, the master could not refuse it. Twelve centuries before any attempt was made by any individual or community to legislate for the liberty of slaves, a dweller in the Arabian desert had laid down this noble institution, that, if a slave asked for a writing of freedom, he was not only to be given that writing by the master, but he was also to be provided with money to purchase his freedom, the only condition being *if you know any good in them*, i.e., if he is fit for work and able to earn his livelihood. And, in addition, the duty was imposed upon the State of spending a part of the collection of the poor-rate for this object, as stated in 9:60.

**34** And certainly We have sent to you clear messages and a description of those who passed away before you, and an admonition to those who guard against evil.

## SECTION 5: Manifestation of Divine Light

**35** Allah is the light of the *samâwât* and the earth. A likeness of His light is as a pillar on which is a lamp — the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as it were a brightly shining star — lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof gives light, though fire touch it not — light upon light.<sup>a</sup> Allâh guides to His light whom He pleases. And Allâh sets forth parables for men, and Allâh is Knower of all things —

**33c.** It is related that ‘Abd Allâh ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites, kept slave-girls for prostitution (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). Prostitution, which seems to have prevailed before the advent of Islâm in Arabia, is condemned here. But this curse has obtained an incredible prevalence in the whole of Christendom, and is legalized in many countries of Europe as a *necessary evil*, while in others it is openly connived at.

**35a.** *Nûr* (light) is that which manifests hidden things, and Allâh is called here the light of the *samâwât* and the earth, because He has manifested them and brought them into existence. *Mishkât* means a niche, but *Mujâhid* ibn Jâbar (*Tâbi‘î*) explains it as meaning ‘*amûd* or pillar (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

In the parable that follows, Islâm is represented as a likeness of the Divine light, a light placed high on a pillar so as to illuminate the whole world; a light guarded by being placed in a glass, so that no puff of wind can put it out; a light so resplendent that the glass itself in which it is placed is as a brilliant star. It should be noted that the religion of Islâm is repeatedly spoken of as *Divine light* in the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân: “They desire to put out *the light of Allâh* with their mouths, but Allâh will allow nothing save the perfection of *His light*, though the disbelievers are averse” (9:32; 61:8). Hence it is of Islâm that the parable of Divine light speaks. The *blessed olive*, from which that light is lit, and which stands here for a symbol of Islâm, as the fig stands for a symbol of Judaism (see 95:3a), belongs neither to the East nor to the West. Even so is Islâm, which must give light to both the East and the West, and which, therefore, does not specially belong to either of them. The reference seems to be to the welding together of the East and the West in Islâm, a prophecy which is now approaching its fulfilment in the awakening of the West to the truth of the principles of Islâm.

The parable becomes clearer if the word *nûr* (light) be taken to refer to the Holy Prophet. The Prophet was by nature gifted with the highest qualifications. Even before he received Divine revelation, his life was a life of purity and devoted to the

service of humanity. Light emanated from him even before the light from on High came to him in the form of Divine revelation, so that when revelation came to him it was *light upon light*.

**36** (It is) in houses which Allâh has permitted to be exalted and His name to be remembered therein.<sup>a</sup> Therein do glorify Him, in the mornings and the evenings,

**37** Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allâh and the keeping up of prayer and the paying of the poor-rate — they fear a day in which the hearts and the eyes will turn about,<sup>a</sup>

**38** That Allâh may give them the best reward for what they did, and give them more out of His grace. And Allâh provides without measure for whom He pleases.

**36a.** The Divine light spoken of in the last verse is here stated as being met with in certain houses, the distinctive mark of those houses being that the name of Allâh is remembered in them, thus showing that these houses are the houses of Muslims, and the light is therefore the light of Islâm. These houses, we are further told, though humble now, will be *exalted*. And the exaltation of the humble huts of the Arab dwellers of the desert to royal palaces is a fact of history.

**37a.** A further description of these houses makes the reference still more clear. In these houses Allâh is glorified in the morning and the evening, and therefore these can be the houses of no other than Muslims, because the keeping up of prayer and the paying of the poor-rate is the distinguishing characteristic of Islâm. The opposition to his light and the end of that opposition are described in the two concluding verses of the section. The turning about of the hearts and the eyes means: either that they will be transformed in the new life or that they will be in a state of commotion by reason of fear. The verse that follows lends support to the first significance.

**39** And those who disbelieve, their deeds are as a mirage in a desert, which the thirsty **one** deems to be water, until, when he comes to it, he finds it naught, and he finds Allâh with him, so He pays him his due. And Allâh is Swift at reckoning —

**40** Or like darkness in the deep sea — there covers him a wave, above which is a wave, above which is a cloud — (layers of) darkness one above another — when he holds out his hand, he is almost unable to see it. And to whom Allâh gives not light, he has no light.<sup>a</sup>

## SECTION 6: Manifestation of Divine Power

**41** See you not that Allâh is He, Whom do glorify all those who are in the *samâwât* and the earth, and the birds with wings outspread? Each one knows its prayer and its glorification. And Allâh is Knower of what they do.

**42** And Allâh's is the kingdom of the *samâwât* and the earth, and to Allâh is the eventual coming.

**43** See you not that Allâh drives along the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up, so that you see the rain coming forth from their midst? And He sends down from the *samâ'* (clouds like) mountains, wherein is hail, afflicting there-with whom He pleases and turning it away from whom He pleases. The flash of His lightning almost takes away the sight.

**40a.** As the first part of the section gives a picture of the brilliant and dazzling Divine light which is given to the believers, the last part describes the utter darkness of doubt and ignorance in which the disbelievers are. Their apparent hopes of success are compared with a mirage, and, when they are undeceived of these, they will find themselves in the presence of Allâh and will have their dues paid to them.

**44** Allâh causes the night and the day to succeed one another. Surely there is a lesson in this for those who have sight.

**45** And Allâh has created every animal of water.<sup>a</sup> So of them is that which crawls upon its belly, and of them is that which walks upon two feet, and of them is that which walks upon four.<sup>b</sup> Allâh creates what He pleases. Surely Allâh is Possessor of power over all things.

**46** We have indeed revealed clear messages. And Allâh guides whom He pleases to the right way.

**47** And they say: We believe in Allâh and in the Messenger and we obey; then a party of them turn away after this, and they are not believers.

**48** And when they are invited to Allâh and His Messenger that he may judge between them, lo! A party of them turn aside.

**49** And if the right is on their side, they hasten to him in submission.

**45a.** Here only animals are spoken of as having been created from water, but elsewhere we are told that all life, whether animal or plant, has been created from water (21:30); see 21:30*b*.

**45b.** The various kinds of animal life are here divided into three classes: (1) The creeping things, the lowest and the first form in the development of animal life. (2) Those walking upon two legs, such as birds, the second form of the development of animal life. Human beings, though walking on two legs, is not included in them, because human life is the highest form of the development of animal life, and it is generally mentioned as quite distinct from all animal life. (3) Those which walk on four legs, and to this class belong most of the mammals.

**50** Is there in their hearts a disease, or are they in doubt, or fear they that Allâh and His Messenger will deal with them unjustly? Nay! They themselves are the wrongdoers.

## SECTION 7: Establishment of the Kingdom of Islâm

**51** The response of the believers, when they are invited to Allâh and His Messenger that he may judge between them is only that they say: We hear and we obey. And these it is that are successful.

**52** And he who obeys Allâh and His Messenger, and fears Allâh and keeps duty to Him, these it is that are the achievers.

**53** And they swear by Allâh with their strongest oaths that, if you command them, they would certainly go forth. Say: Swear not; reasonable obedience (is desired). Surely Allâh is Aware of what you do.

**54** Say: Obey Allâh and obey the Messenger. But if you turn away, he is responsible for the duty imposed on him, and you are responsible for the duty imposed on you. And if you obey him, you go aright. And the Messenger's duty is only to deliver (the message) plainly.

**55** Allâh has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will surely make them *khalifah* (successors) in the earth as He made those before them successors, and that He will surely establish for them their *Dîn*, which He has chosen for them, and that He will surely give them security in exchange after their fear. They will serve Me, not associating aught with

Me. And whoever is ungrateful after this, they are the transgressors.<sup>a</sup>

**56** And keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and obey the Messenger, so that mercy may be shown to you.

**57** Think not that those who disbelieve will weaken (the Truth) in the earth; and their abode is the Fire. And it is indeed an evil resort!

## SECTION 8: **Respect for Privacy**

**58** O you who believe, let those whom your right hands possess and those of you who have not attained to puberty ask permission of you three times: Before the morning prayer, and when you put off your clothes for the heat of noon, and after the prayer of night. These are three times of privacy for you; besides these it is no sin for you nor for them— do some of you go round about (waiting) upon others. Thus does Allâh make clear to you the messages. And Allâh is Knowing, Wise.<sup>a</sup>

**55a.** This verse not only prophesies the establishment of the kingdom of Islâm, but also its permanence, so that successors will be raised to the Holy Prophet and the Muslims made a ruling nation on earth. By *those before them* are meant in particular *the followers of Mûsâ (Anwâr al-Tanzîl wa Asrâr al-Ta'wîl (Commentary), by Qâzî Abû Sa'îd 'Abd Allâh ibn 'Umar al-Baidâwî*). Islâm at the time of the revelation of these verses was still surrounded by enemies on all sides; there was still fear for the believers, as the verse clearly shows, and idol-worship still had the upper hand in Arabia. The triumph of Islâm, which is prophesied in the parable of the *Divine Light* first, and the gradual advent of which is referred to afterwards, is here predicted in the clearest and most emphatic terms: the believers will be made rulers in the earth; their religion will be firmly established; security will be given to them in place of fear; Divine Unity will rule supreme. All these favours will be bestowed upon the Muslims, for which they should be thankful; but, if they are ungrateful after that, they shall be dealt with as transgressors. *Kafara* means *he disbelieved* as well as *he was ungrateful*, and the latter significance suits the context here. Even if *kufra* is taken as meaning *disbelief* here, it would mean a denial in practice, or disobedience to Divine commandments.

Though the promise contained in this verse refers clearly to the establishment of the kingdom of Islâm and to the Muslims being made successors to the Isrâ'îlites as



regards the promised Holy Land, there is also a reference here to the Divine promise to raise reformers among the Muslims as prophets were raised among the Israelites. Such is the clear promise contained in a saying of the Holy Prophet: “Surely Allâh will raise up for this people (i.e., the Muslims) in the beginning of every century one who will revive for it its religion” (*Kitâb al-Sunan* (Hadîth), by *Abû Dâwûd Sulaimân* 36:1). The promise given in the verse may therefore refer not only to the temporal successors of the Holy Prophet, but also to his spiritual successors or reformers. The analogy of the Isrâ’îlites, to which the verse refers, points to the appearance of a Messiah among the Muslims as a Messiah was raised among the Israelites, and it was on this verse that the claim of the late Hadrat Mirza Ghûlam Aḥmad of Qadian, the founder of the Aḥmadiyyah movement, was based. He claimed to be a reformer for the fourteenth century of the Hijrah and the Messiah whose advent among the Muslims was foretold.

**59** And when the children among you attain to puberty, let them seek permission as those before them sought permission. Thus does Allâh make clear to you His messages. And Allâh is Knowing, Wise.

**60** And (as for) women past childbearing,<sup>a</sup> who hope not for marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their clothes without displaying their adornment. And if they are modest, it is better for them. And Allâh is Hearing, Knowing.

**61** There is no blame on the blind **man**, nor any blame on the lame, nor blame on the sick,<sup>a</sup> nor on yourselves that you eat in your own houses, or your fathers’ houses, or your mothers’ houses, or your brothers’ houses, or your sisters’ houses, or your paternal uncles’ houses, or your paternal aunts’ houses, or your maternal uncles’ houses, or your maternal aunts’ houses, or (houses) whereof you possess the keys, or your friends’ (houses). It is no sin in you that you eat together or separately. So when you enter houses, greet your people with a salutation from Allâh, blessed (and) goodly. Thus does Allâh make clear to you the messages that you may understand.

**58a.** Rules relating to personal and family privacy are of the utmost importance in the betterment of social relations, and their non-observance leads to all kinds of false reports, which scandal-mongers are always ready to lay hold upon, thereby creating dissensions in society.

**60a.** *Qâ'id* (plural *qawâ'id*) signifies a woman who has ceased to bear children and to have the menstrual discharge (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The reference in putting off *clothes* is to the over-garment spoken of in 33:59.

**61a.** The Arabs had their scruples in eating with the blind, etc., in which respect they were like the Jews and some other people. The Hindus to this day eat separately. Islâm lays down a middle rule, and allows the individual great latitude in this respect. A man may eat alone or with others, he may eat with the maimed, etc., or he may eat in the houses of near relations and friends. The latter part of the verse shows that a certain degree of familiarity in the case of near relatives is recommended, so that one can take food with them, even though he may not have been invited specially.

## SECTION 9: Matters of State to take Precedence

**62** Only those are believers who believe in Allâh and His Messenger, and when they are with him on a momentous affair, they go not away until they have asked leave of him. Surely they who ask leave of you, are they who believe in Allâh and His Messenger; so when they ask leave of you for some affair of theirs, give leave to whom you will of them, and ask forgiveness for them from Allâh. Surely Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.

**63** Make not the calling among you of the Messenger as your calling one of another.<sup>a</sup> Allâh indeed knows those who steal away from among you, concealing themselves. So let those who go against his order beware, lest a trial afflict them or there befall them a painful chastisement.

**63a.** It does not mean how the Prophet is to be addressed, but in what manner his call is to be responded to. The context makes it clear. The previous verse states that none is to leave without the Prophet's permission, when they are gathered together for some important affair requiring their presence, and the words that follow this passage are to the same effect. What is stated here is that the Prophet's call to the believers is to be respected, and not to be treated as their calling one of another; because the Prophet's call relates to some important affair affecting the welfare of the community, while their mutual calling one of another relates to their own private affairs.

**64** Now surely Allâh's is whatever is in the *samâwât* and the earth. He knows indeed your condition. And on the day when they are returned to Him, He will inform them of what they did. And Allâh is Knower of all things.